

A NEW SAINT -- BROTHER BENILDE, FSC

Proclamation

On October 29, during canonization ceremonies attended by hundreds of Brothers, their students, alumni and friends from all over the world, Pope Paul had had proclaimed that Brother Benilde is a saint. (Facing eminent surgery, the Holy Father's doctors forbade him to preside. In his stead, Arcadio Cardinal Larraona, CMF, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites charged with matters pertaining to canonizations, an affiliated member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and honorary alumnus of St. Mary's College, California, presided and read the Proclamation.) In simple terms, this Proclamation declares that Brother Benilde is surely enjoying the ultimate fulfillment of the Christian life, and that as an intimate of God he is a powerful advocate to whom we can turn in imitation and prayer.

He is the first teaching Brother so honored.

Endorsement

The Church does not indulge in idle gestures. Coming at a time when religious life is undergoing reappraisal and renewal, when the Brothers of the Christian Schools in a general chapter in Rome are charting their future, when teachers generally are struggling for new recognition and status, when short term commitments are advanced as substitutes for lifetime service, the Church draws attention to a Brother who for 42 years was teacher and principal in little-known towns in France. The canonization of Benilde is designed to endorse the religious life, the teaching Brother, the nobility of teaching, and the value of unreserved commitment. Far from halting renewal and change, this canonization underlines in the life of

Benilde the faith, patience, love and sacrifice that must accompany authentic progress and true success.

In 1836, diminutive Pierre Romancon, as Brother Benilde, made his final vows at the age of 28. These and his devotion to liturgy, prayer and labor were to become his means to sanctity. Living his vows liberated him for direct, limitless love and service of God and his students. There was no dichotomy between his life and his profession as teacher. He proved that real integration of natural and supernatural truths is best realized in the person of a teacher who reveals an honest reverence for the natural and the secular, while his personal life is a testament to his conviction of the transcendence of the Divine. Such an authentic witness becomes so translucent that Christ shines through. Students anticipated Pope Paul VI by calling Benilde "the Saint," and God much later endorsed their verdict by miracles.

Career at Saugues

His fifth and final assignment brought him to Saugues in 1841 as teacher and principal of the town's first school for boys. Here, in an isolated community of farmers and artisans trying to eke out an existence from the barren soil, Benilde and his staff of Brothers initiated crude youngsters to learning, and taught evening classes to the parents who caught the children's fire. From the canton of Saugues, which moderns would call another Appalachia, came 240 priestly and religious vocations during the 21 years of Benilde's

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administration.

Such a short account glosses over the difficulties, disappointments and failures, some tragic, some humorous—like the defiant youngster who threw three dead cats over the Brothers' garden wall. They landed at the feet of Benilde who was conducting a make-up class for the boys who had been ill. The patience with which he buried the cats in the garden was balanced by the justice that befell the culprit in school.

Teachers, generally, do not lead spectacular lives. Neither did Benilde. But only teachers can know the

daily challenge of imparting truth, and the quiet but satisfying struggle of raising the sights of earthbound students to realities they little dream of. Somehow, common folk sense this better than savants. The townspeople of obscure Saugues were prophets when they etched on his tombstone:

"To the memory of the venerated Brother Benilde, first Director of the School of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at Saugues, who died with the reputation of sanctity, August 13, 1862. The memory of the just shall be eternal."